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ABSTRACT

Deans of schools of education (N=249) answered a survey probing current resources, plans for expansion, incentives needed for expanding personnel resources, and barriers to program development in special education programs covering the needs of infants and toddlers. Almost half reported no special education program at any level, but 40% reported willingness to consider initiation or expansion of such a program given adequate incentives. Lacks of funding and qualified faculty were seen as major barriers. Subsidies, planning at the state level, and a major recruitment effort were seen as promising policy options to remedy these problems. Contains six references. (PB)

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AVAILABLE AND POTENTIAL
RESOURCES FOR PERSONNEL
PREPARATION IN SPECIAL
EDUCATION: DEANS SURVEY

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EC231P52

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a widespread concern among various professional groups about the possible shortages of qualified personnel to meet the requirements of P.L. 99-457 (Part H), to provide appropriate services for infants and toddlers with handicapping conditions and their families. The Carolina Policy Studies Program initiated a policy study in the field of special education, as one discipline with a potential personnel shortage, but also an area recently stimulated to work with young children with handicapping conditions by earlier legislative initiatives such as the Preschool Incentive Grants and various state mandates for service to young handicapped children.

Two hundred and forty-nine Deans of schools of education answered a survey which asked about current resources, plans for expansion, needed incentives for increasing personnel resources and barriers to program development with the following results.

- Seventy-nine schools reported a masters degree program in early education, 38 reported an undergraduate program and 24 a doctoral program. One hundred and sixty-two deans reported no program at any level.
- Forty percent of the Deans reported a willingness to consider initiation or expansion of a program in early childhood for handicapped children given certain incentives.

- Incentives that were viewed as valuable by the Deans were some method of increased funding, data that would reflect a job demand in the field, and certification requirements which would indicate a continuing commitment of the state.
- Major barriers were seen as lack of funding, lack of qualified faculty, or places to train faculty in this special area.

The results indicated a need for proactive steps to be taken by decision makers to ensure adequate supply of personnel. Policy options that were considered to aid in the expansion of personnel preparation in this and other disciplines were: subsidies of personnel preparation for both students and programs, professional association standard setting, comprehensive and coordinated higher education planning at the state level, and a major effort at recruitment of young students into the field.

One of the key elements to successful implementation of P. L. 99-457 (Part H) is an adequate and efficient personnel preparation program. This legislation creates a need for increased numbers of well qualified persons to meet the increased service demands for infants and toddlers and their families that are required by this legislation. But, there is widespread concern as to whether the existing or projected institutional resources for personnel preparation are sufficient to meet the law's requirements (Bailey, 1989). Previous surveys have indicated serious personnel shortages (Meisels, Harbin, Modigliani, & Olsen, 1988; Yoder & Coleman, 1990).

Of the ten professional disciplines that have been identified as involved in the implementation of this legislation, university special education programs in many states have already faced the task of developing personnel preparation programs for young children in responding to some state mandated services as well as the federal Preschool Incentive Grants designed to increase services for three to five year olds. It was felt that of all the disciplines mentioned in the legislation that special education might be in a strong position to respond to the additional personnel preparation initiatives called for in P.L. 99-457 (Part H). To address this question the Carolina Policy Studies Program sent a survey to Deans of Schools of Education throughout the country who had a graduate program in special education. There will be similar inquiries made of other disciplines who reveal an intention to pursue systematic training initiatives.

The survey sought the answer to four main questions. (1) What are the personnel preparation higher education resources available? (2) Is there evidence of a higher education initiative in building new training

programs for professionals to serve this age group? (3) What are the factors that would influence a Dean's decision to proceed in this area? (4) What incentives would be required to encourage higher education participation?

METHOD

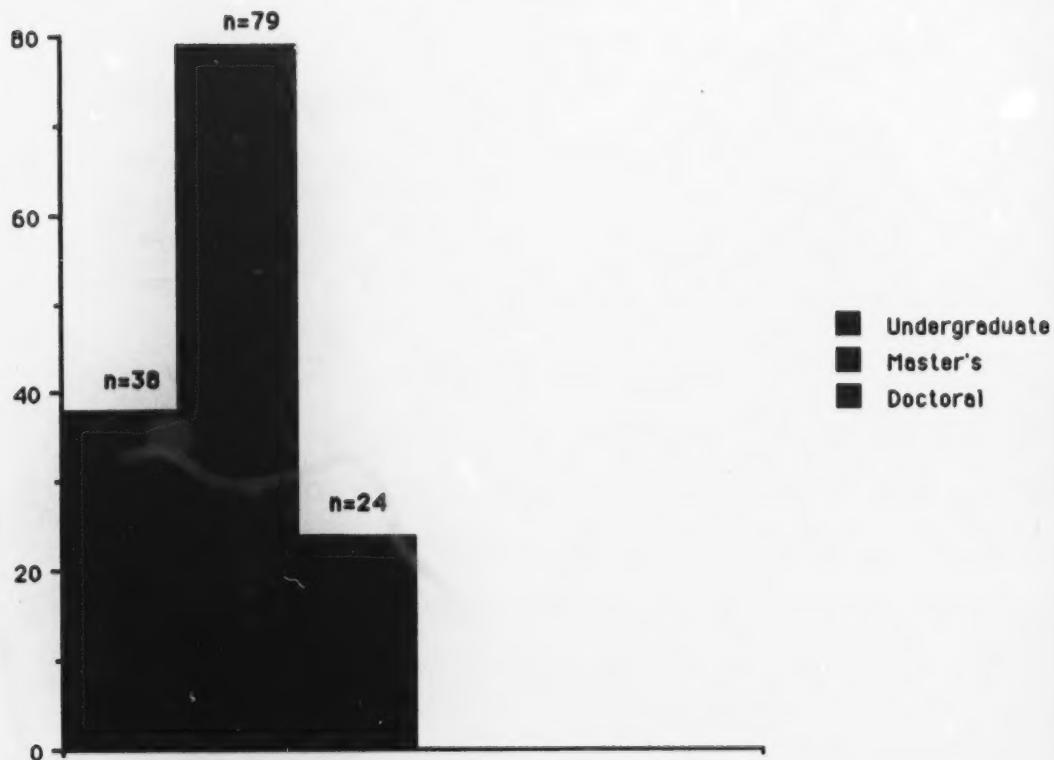
A survey was designed to answer these questions by CPSP staff and critiqued and refined by CPSP staff and consultants. The names and addresses of the Deans were obtained by referring to the Peterson's Graduate Education Directory, (Miers & Goldstein, 1986). A total of 410 surveys were sent to Deans of education in institutions in July, 1989 that listed a graduate program in special education.

One hundred and seventy Deans responded to the original request. Follow up letters and surveys were sent a month after the initial mailing. Brief descriptions of P.L. 99-457, Part H, were enclosed with the surveys. This additional appeal yielded an overall total of 249 responses for a response rate of 60%. Forty states were represented in this sample. A coding system was developed for the open-ended questions and the surveys were coded by a graduate assistant. Categories for responses to the open-ended questions were determined by sampling a number of the surveys. Frequency counts were obtained for each of the questions.

RESULTS

Levels of Existing Programs. Figure 1 indicates those colleges or universities which reported having an early childhood special education program in personnel preparation at the undergraduate, masters and/or doctoral level. Out of 249 institutions, eighty-four reported a program at one or more of the levels. One hundred and sixty-two reported that

Figure 1. Number of Early Childhood Special Education Programs (Respondents N=249)*



*** 162 Schools reported no existing program at any level**

they had no program. Seventy-nine institutions reported the presence of a masters program in early childhood special education, thirty-eight reported an undergraduate program, and twenty-four identified a doctoral program or doctoral emphasis in this early childhood area.

The number of graduates is another indicator of the extent of the programs. The sum of graduates from the undergraduate programs was 326 or an average of about nine per program. Four hundred and twenty-five students were reported as graduating from a masters program in early childhood special education or an average of about five per program. Sixteen doctoral students were graduated from early childhood special education programs or an average of less than one graduate per program. These existing programs do provide a higher education base for an organized personnel preparation strategy.

Future Plans for Program Expansion

One of the questions asked of the 249 education leaders was whether they had any plans or intentions in beginning or increasing their commitment to this area in the next five years. Forty percent of the respondents suggested that they might be interested in doing so. This provides a potential for increase in the number of trained personnel that seems significant, if these schools followed through on their interests and intentions.

At the same time, it is clear that there are many colleges and universities which do not have any current intention to develop or expand the type of early childhood programs reported here. This may be due to a certain reserve that has been developing in higher education institutions regarding past federal initiatives and reflected in the stated concerns on the part of the Deans as to whether there will be a consistent effort by

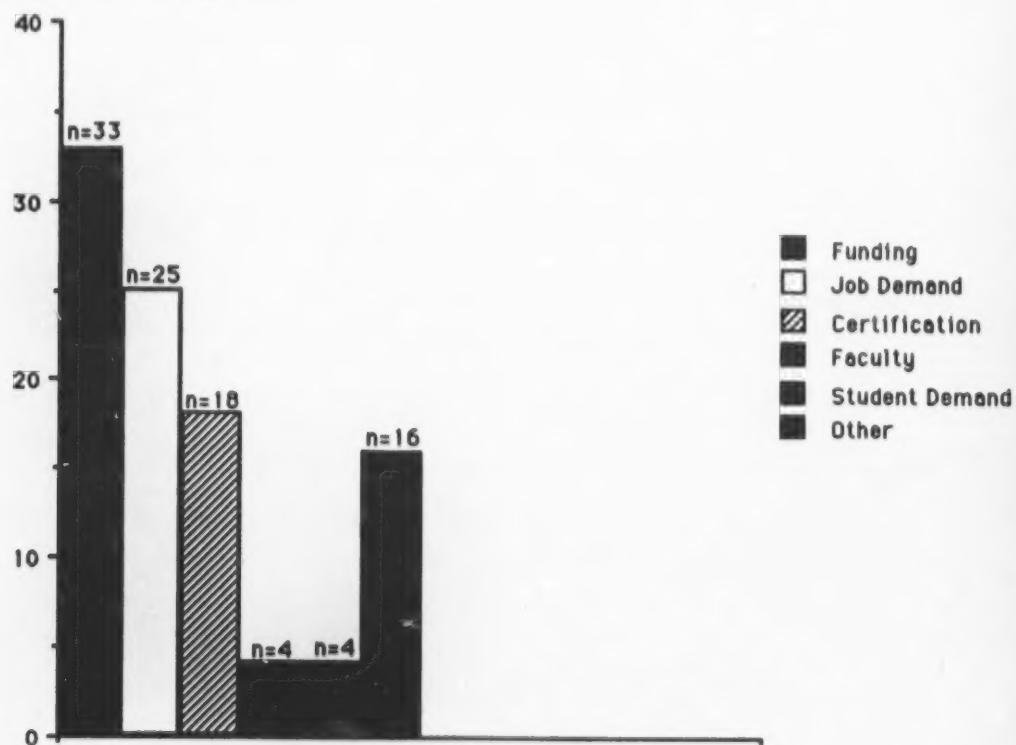
state or federal governments to provide funding for such personnel preparation programs. Many schools reported that they already were "stretched too thin" to take on another program. Others pointed out that they were under restrictions as to how many new students they could accept.

Needed Incentives

One of the open-ended survey questions asked the Deans to comment upon the incentives needed for further program development in the infant and toddler area. Figure 2 shows the incentives that the Deans felt would be important in their decision to initiate or further develop early childhood special education programs. It is not surprising that additional funding for support of the programs leads the list of incentives. The cost of supporting small and specialized personnel preparation programs, such as for infants and toddlers, is high and not self supporting.

Two other factors are important to note. Twenty-five Deans reported that they would want to see some kind of tangible evidence of job demand in the field before they would be willing to commit further resources to the development of such programs. Another eighteen Deans suggested that some form of certification or licensing by the state would show a commitment to formal personnel preparation standards. Such a commitment would translate into students seeking certification for these standards and a potential pool of students for the personnel preparation programs. Only a few Deans reported faculty or student demand as an important issue. Essentially, the Deans suggested that they want some outside evidence from the community at large that there

Figure 2: Incentives for Developing Early Childhood Special Education Programs



is a need and demand for such programs before they would be willing to initiate or support program development activities at their schools.

Barriers

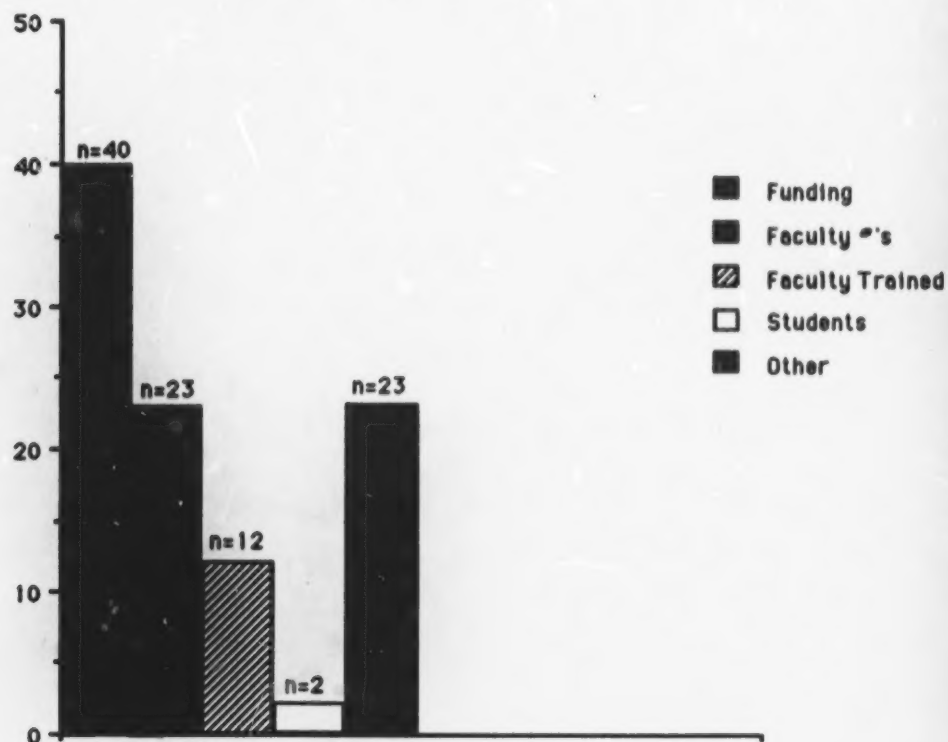
Figure 3 indicates the barriers that the Deans reported for developing programs in early childhood special education. Lack of funding is a clear barrier, but so are the number of faculty now available and the lack of trained faculty in the field itself. The Deans wonder whether there is a pool of professionals available to recruit for developing training programs. The fact that there are few students at this point did not seem to be a major barrier. There was a miscellaneous collection of concerns specific to their own institutions that the Deans expressed that are indicated in the "other" column in Figure 3.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The message that seems to be clear from the survey, and which has policy implications for the development of Part H, P.L. 99-457, is that there will be no automatic positive response from higher education to provide a greater supply of early childhood special educators. There were 104 Deans who were not planning to increase or initiate early childhood special education programs and many of the rest of the respondents made their future interest contingent upon the improved conditions or incentives noted in this report.

The Deans want to see some tangible evidence of demand and a market for such personnel. They are also looking for some form of subsidy as a tangible aid. Most of the Deans recognized that this would be a small program, in any event, in the total complex of education or special education and would likely not be economically self sufficient. They appear to be asking, "Is it worth the effort?"

Figure 3: Barriers to Developing Programs in Early Childhood Special Education



The further message is that if we wish a major higher education participation in special education in the Part H implementation, there will have to be some set of incentives presented by the state or the federal government, to encourage further development of personnel preparation programs.

Policy Options

What options are available to policy makers to encourage greater participation by schools of education in those areas of personnel preparation necessary for quality services for children with developmental delays and their families? Several avenues appear to be available.

Personnel Preparation Subsidies. The success of the OSEP federal program in subsidizing students to enter personnel shortage areas in special education should lead to its continuence and expansion. Other disciplines may wish to consider some similar incentives.

Such subsidies to both students and higher education institutions would recognize the reality that these early intervention preparation programs will necessarily be small and not be economically viable for personnel preparations institutions. In a period of economic retrenchment for most higher education institutions some continuing multiyear subsidy may be a necessary incentive to establish or extend existing programs for this target group of children and families.

Professional Association Standards. Various professional associations have been working to establish a set of personnel preparation standards for serving infants and toddlers with developmental delays and their families (Bruder, Koslowski, & Daguio, 1989). This process can be accelerated and highlighted. The

establishment of standards has the effect of identifying and solidifying an area of preparation, as well as convincing training institutions that there is both a need and market for such professionals.

If those standards also include multiple layers of personnel preparation (professionals, aides, etc.) and the use of multidisciplinary teams and multilevel personnel, new professional roles (consulting, supervisory, case management, etc.) may need to be established and standards set. The use of professional associations to set standards would have the additional advantage of having one set of national standards instead of fifty distinctive state standards.

Comprehensive Planning. There would seem to be the need for some type of long-range planning mechanism bringing together state agencies and higher education institutions (universities, community colleges, etc.) that would include representation from a number of professional disciplines. Some form of higher education-state agency consortium may be necessary to allocate scarce fiscal and personnel preparation resources in the most productive fashion. This kind of mechanism would need to operate over the extended period of time necessary to establish continuing programs of personnel preparation to provide a flow of qualified personnel.

Recruitment. There needs to be a systematic program of recruitment of students to the career opportunities available in the new multidisciplinary intervention programs for young children with developmental disabilities and their families. There are many persons who seek some type of service occupation which may fit their desire to be of help to others. A major public information campaign to alert such persons to the advantages of work with this population can extend the

available pool of potential professionals and support personnel for these programs.

An earlier CPSP policy alert (Gallagher, 1989) pointed out the number of years necessary to initiate a new program in higher education institutions, so it is important that some proactive steps be taken as soon as possible to ensure adequate personnel preparation for this program.

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